

162 *Comments on the Mighty*

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Président passé là,
L'ap monté au gouvernement! [Ex. 118]

The President passes by,
He is taking over the government!
The President passes by,
He is taking over the government!

* 533 758 646 It is not only great political events that are perpetuated in songs like these; many are the comments on little people in the government, such as a legislator named Daniel Fignolé. One of Fignolé's deeds, probably apocryphal, which is recorded in folk song has to do with an act of justice in a hospital in Port-au-Prince. According to the song, Fignolé entered the hospital and found the rich patients on beds and the poor patients on mats on the floor. He promptly ordered the rich patients placed on the floor and the poor patients placed on the beds. (A few [643] years later, after serving as president for less than three weeks, Fignolé became a political exile in the United States.)

* 533 499 496 There is also an old song about a government engineer named Louis Gentil Tippenhauer—or Ti 'Benhauer (Little 'Benhauer), as he was commonly known. Tippenhauer is now an old man, but when he was young he was in charge of the construction of a section of the Haitian narrow-gauge railway. There was an accident in which a smoking locomotive jumped the tracks. Though small in stature, Tippenhauer had a forceful personality. He quickly assembled his workmen, and with chains, ropes, and crowbars they wrestled the locomotive back on the rails. The song commemorating the dramatic event was born at the height of the rescue operation. It is marked with concern for the feelings of Engineer Tippenhauer:

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Ti 'Benhauer rélé, "Porté cord pou' marré li!"
Ti 'Benhauer rélé, "Porté chaine pou' enchainé li!"
Si ou marré'l la lagwè, devant Bondieu!
Pau' diab', pau' 'Benhauer, machine na derailé!
Pau' diab', pau' 'Benhauer, machine na derailé!

Ti 'Benhauer shouts, "Bring a rope to tie it!"
Ti 'Benhauer shouts, "Bring a chain to chain it!"
If you tie it, it unties itself, before God!
Poor devil, poor 'Benhauer, the machine is derailed!
Poor devil, poor 'Benhauer, the machine is derailed!

It is more than half a century since the affair of the derailed locomotive, and the railroad itself is not much longer for this world. But the song is still sung, and mostly by people who have no personal knowledge of the man named Tippenhauer.

THE HAITIAN PEOPLE

712 the battlements far off across the tortuous mass of mountains and
 [713] green valleys, admire the sheer strength of will which made His Majesty's subjects bear four hundred cannon up the steep and rocky path—not to mention thousands of cannon balls now rusting away after a century of disuse, or the powder and shot which once filled [173] the magazines. It is said that five thousand soldiers could be housed in the fortress at once. If this is hyperbole, one hardly dare challenge [703] it, for the whole Citadel belittles the individual man. It is likewise said that Christophe once made a battalion of soldiers march off the cliff to their death merely to demonstrate his absolute control over them. Such stories grow up around His Black Majesty. He lies entombed in his useless but still superb fortress—and lives in the memory of the Northerners, one of whom said proudly: "We of the North have a great heritage, and you will find that we are all dominated by *une psychologie citadelienne*."

[766] Dungeons, secret passages, royal apartments, separate rooms for each of the old Dutch, Spanish, French, and English cannon, some of them dating back to the seventeenth century—all the paraphernalia of the storybook fortress is present. From a bastion one gazes, as from an alp, for miles in any direction, and feels that La Ferrière is certainly one of the most impressive, and one of the most futile, edifices in the world. If the silent cannon had ever been fired, their balls would have rumbled harmlessly down the mountainside. The suspicion grows that Christophe achieved his architectural miracle not primarily as a defense against the French, but to make his subjects proud of what a nation of despised ex-slaves could accomplish.

344 Five miles away, at the foot of the mountain, is the village of
 644 Milor, with the ruins of the palace of Sans Souci. Of yellow stone, it spreads out spaciouly like a French château. Its rooms must have been magnificent. The palace is so situated that one may look out across the northern plains to the sea, or up the valleys to mountain peaks. In Sans Souci Christophe shot himself in 1820 when he knew that only *souci* would remain to him if he lived.

489 Transportation from one part of the country to another is far from
 • [496] easy. There are no railroads—unless one counts the short line running north a few miles from Port-au-Prince to nowhere in particular, and the equally short line coming west into Cap-Haïtien from the fields [491] of the northern plain. Roads built by the American Marines make automobile travel between the main towns possible, if one does not